

Rethinking the Crisis of Capital in Light of the Crisis of the Left

Peter Hudis

"Far from expressing a sequence of never-ending progression, the Hegelian dialectic lets retrogression appear as translucent as progression and indeed makes it very nearly inevitable if one ever tries to escape regression by mere faith."—Raya Dunayevskaya[1]

IT MAY SEEM IRONIC that a moment so typified by the crisis of capital calls for a serious critique of the crisis on the Left; however, in the present moment it has become impossible to take on the crisis of existing society without facing the limitations found in prevailing leftist responses to it.

The Left's response to the financial crisis and bailout provides a case in point. One might suspect from reading the radical press in recent weeks that the government bailout of global financial institutions represents a hidden acknowledgment on the part of devotees of the free market that the socialists have been right all along. After all, has not the federal government stepped in to regulate and oversee financial institutions on an unprecedented scale? Is not the Republican Right up in arms over the specter of "socialism" that now haunts the Federal Reserve? Has not "Main Street" finally woken up to the need to impose greater state control over Wall Street? Lost in all this, of course, is the simple recognition that state intervention is as old as capitalism and is as integral to its dynamics as the market. "State intervention" and "market anarchy" are not and never have been absolute opposites. The Left, however, caught in a superficial understanding of capital and transfixed by the sudden use of the "s" word in the media, deludes itself into believing that it may one day be able to ride to victory on the backs of state intervention in the economy—even though Bush is leading the charge.

In light of this, Chris Cutrone's (2008) "Capital in history: The need for a Marxian philosophy of history of the Left" is a refreshing contribution to re-thinking today's crises because of the way it confronts the poverty that defines most radical discourse. I agree that the main problem is "the commonplace view of capitalism as primarily a problem of exploitation." Many frequently often overlook that capital is a unique social form of domination defined by the logic of abstraction—viz, capital is congealed abstract or value-creating labor. The relationships established through modern labor are not merely exploitative but alienating. Capital as a social form is defined not by individual or state ownership of property but by the domination of concrete, living labor by abstract, dead labor. Capitalism cannot be annulled without abolishing capital, and capital cannot be annulled without creating non-alien-

ated human relations at work and in society as a whole.

My main disagreement with Cutrone's article concerns the basis of the "historical consciousness" needed for orienting us towards capital's transcendence. I agree that Marx held that the "proletarianization" of society—the consolidation of industrial capitalism and the universalization of wage labor—does not necessarily point to capital's transcendence.[2] Marx certainly did not conceive of socialism as industrialized labor "coming into its own." I nevertheless argue that the internal dynamics of capitalism generate the means by which capital can be overcome. There is a marked difference, between the proletarianization of society and the proletariat's effort to overcome the existing society by resisting the domination of concrete labor by abstract labor. The overcoming of this distinct form of domination, however, requires the self-abolition of the proletariat as a class. That goal can be reached only by uprooting capital from within through the self-activity of the proletariat and other social forces that resist and seek to negate the value form of mediation.

There are ways to consider the overcoming of capital without the participation of the working class, but they tend towards disconcerting conclusions. Take the case of Proudhon: Marx did not consider him a representative of "proletarian socialism" despite the fact that a significant section the French workers' movement followed as him. Marx considered him instead as an exemplar of petty-bourgeois socialism, since Proudhon's critique of capitalism centered on exchange relations instead of the domination of abstract labor. Marx held that proletarian socialism, in contrast, aims to abolish wage labor—and hence capital. In retrospect, I'd argue that Marx's critique of Proudhon brilliantly anticipated the totalitarian "socialism" that defined the 20th century. What led to the latter was not the affirmation of the subjectivity of the proletariat but rather its denigration in the name of state planning and bureaucratic control over industry. Instead of hearing in the workers' resistance to the despotic plan of capital a drive to surmount the domination of dead over living labor, the planners and revolutionary-intellectual "leaders" turned their attention elsewhere—to the "miracles" of modern science and state-imposed "planning" from above. The fetishism of the commodity was replaced by the fetishism of state-planned value production[3]. In doing so they lost sight of the cognitive source that could point the way to capital's transcendence.

At issue today is whether we can develop a viable conception of capital's transcendence by turning our attention away from a vital source of radical critique—the internal

resistance that arises against capital. Capital is not a one-dimensional entity. Though it based on the domination of dead over living labor, it cannot exist without living labor. Capital constantly runs up against an internal contradiction: it seeks to deny the human even as it remains dependent on the human in the form of living labor. No matter how hard it tries, capital cannot avoid encountering resistance. This resistance provides the material basis for our ability to criticize capital. If proletarian resistance marks not the potential negation of capital but its "fullest realization," what is the source of our own critique of capital? What gives us the right to claim insight into what capital is "really" like if it swallows up everything opposed to it? As Hegel taught us, the ability to criticize a phenomenon depends on existing in some sense beyond its limits. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to see it as a problem in the first place.

We here encounter a major stumbling bloc in radical theory. An array of radical thinkers, from Lukacs to Adorno, affirmed the "totalizing" character of capital. However, they never succeeded in explaining what enabled them to gain privileged insight into the "real" nature of capital if it is a totalizing subject that annuls all internal efforts to transcend it. Lukács sought to respond to the problem with his famous theory of "imputed class consciousness." Whereas the workers, according to this view, are trapped within the alienated horizon of capital, "the party to lead" directs the masses to victory by instructing them as to what is really going on. But what gives "the party" this privileged access to truth? Lukács never adequately resolved the problem. Lenin was honest enough [in What is to be Done?] to rely on Karl Kautsky for an answer. He quoted Kautsky's view that "socialist consciousness" is a form of scientific insight that transcends the standpoint of those trapped in the capital relation. Yet where did Kautsky get his notion that "the vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia?" From Ferdinand Lassalle, whom Marx lambasted as a "workers' dictator." [4] As I see it, Marx had a distinctly different conception of the relation between spontaneous struggles and historical consciousness than most "Marxists." [5] In this sense I would agree with Cutrone's statement, "Unfortunately, beginning in Marx's own lifetime, the form of politics he sought to inspire began to fall below the threshold of this critically important consciousness of history."

I am not arguing that grasping the role of spontaneous forms of resistance—especially at critical historical turning points—solves the problem of articulating a viable alternative to capital. That is only where our work first

begins. Once theory listens to the voices of the "wretched of the earth," it becomes imperative to fully develop a conception of a different world that is implicitly contained in them. There is no substitute for being philosophically responsible to history. Although narratives of resistance serve as an important antidote to begin thinking past the capital relation, they are by no means a sufficient condition for constituting an alternative to capital.

The problem that we face today is that the absence of a philosophically grounded alternative to capital negatively impacts the revolutionary potential of ongoing forms of resistance by producing diffidence about the ability to fundamentally change the world. Why should masses of people be expected to rise up against the totalizing nature of capital if radical theorists cannot even manage to point to a viable alternative to it? This is not a mere rhetorical question. The breakdown in projecting a viable conception of socialism represents the greatest failure of Marxism. In this day and age does anyone really expect "the masses" to "storm the heavens" when all that is offered them in the "new society" is to remain imprisoned by the tyranny of the factory clock?

We cannot adequately challenge today's regression by leaving a gap between "is" and "ought"—between our critique of capital and our conception of the alternative to it. One reason why many leftists settle for halfway houses and partial solutions is that alternative views that leave us with an unresolved "ought" are so unappealing. Just as the educators need to be educated, so we who subject the Left to criticism must examine whether we are living up to the historical task of projecting a viable alternative to its shortcomings. **IP**

Notes

[1] See The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx, by Raya Dunayevskaya, edited by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), p. 330. [2] For more on this, see "The Death of the Death of the Subject," by Peter Hudis, Historical Materialism, 12 (3), pp. 147-148.

[3] This argument rests on the claim that "Soviet" type societies were state-capitalist. For more on this, see The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism, by Raya Dunayevskaya, edited with an introduction by Peter Hudis (Chicago: News and Letters, 1992).

[4] See Marx's letter to Engels of April 9, 1863. "His attitude is that of a future workers' dictator." For a detailed discussion of how Lenin's organizational concepts owed much to the views of Kautsky and Lassalle, see "Developing a Philosophically Grounded Alternative to Capitalism," by Peter Hudis, Socialism and Democracy, 19 (2), July 2005, pp. 1-8.

[5] The assumption that workers are incapable of achieving class or socialist consciousness on the basis of their struggles at the point of production was not held by many of the greatest Marxists, such as Pankaj Kumar and Luxemburg. For a discussion of Marx's understanding of this problem, see Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, by Raya Dunayevskaya (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1991).

Retort, continued from page 1



Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times (1936)

terms of statecraft. Logically this is possible. The notion of spectacle at least suggests a tendential development toward a situation in which, empirically, something like this might one day happen. *But September 11 was not it.* It was an image-defeat, yes; but it only produced the long-term or midterm effects that it did because, as an image, it resonated so ominously with the gross material realities of "failed states," the disintegrating world arms market, the threats to the state's monopoly of the means of mass destruction, and the general neo-liberalization of war." [1]

SW: Why has Spectacle figured so prominently in your analysis of post 9/11 politics? Is the role and function of spectacle different now than it was when Debord first developed the category? Did it change as a result of 9/11?

Retort: Much more remains to be said about the new politics of appearance. In various ways, the image-events of the past four years point to forms of warfare beyond the Al-Qaida frame. The militants of September 11 aimed at producing a crisis in the consumption of appearances: they would ensure that for a while the wrong appearance—the anti-appearance—would flood the weak citizen's sensorium. But nowadays the generalized availability of the digital camera, the cell-phone, and the cell-phone video—in the streets and morgues of Lebanon, in Saddam's execution chamber, in Chavez's palace as the US stooges stage their "democratic" coup—begins to alter the terms of image-struggle. A crisis of consumption is followed by a crisis of production. As with war in the twentieth century, there is a strictly technological dimension to the blowback. The new gadgetry is spawned as part of—instrumentation of—the ongoing colonization of everyday life. "Consumers" must become producers, minute by minute, of their alienated image-life. There's money in Facebook. But when strong citizens—most often hideously strong, with the strength of umma and jihad—wish to do battle with their oppressors, they have new weapons at their disposal. They can show on line, in "real" time, what their oppres-

1 Afflicted Powers, 2nd edition, pp. 200-01.

sors are up to. "Bombing" becomes bodies bursting into flame. The "birth-pangs of a new Middle East" turn out not to be family viewing. "Death to the Persians!" Lindie English mugs for the camera. A severed head explodes from the noose.

"Given the global media environment," complained one commentator at the time of the Lebanon invasion, "the terrorists may have developed methods that make it nearly impossible for superior military forces to uproot them." [2] What a shame.

But only a fool would exult in all this. We are no admirers of Sheik Nasrallah. And what Retort thinks is happening is an image-production arms-race, not a wholesale leakage of image-power into the city of slums. Power is working frantically to outmaneuver the opposition. The Chinese Communist Party, we gather, installed 300,000 new CCTVs in Beijing for the Olympics. But do they work? Will they be serviced regularly? What are they for, once the fans have dispersed? Will they keep pace with the forms of resistance to come [which is certainly why the Party spent so much on them]? Or will there be 300,000 bloody sequences, after the event, of bureaucrats pleading for mercy?

Spectacle, as a theory and [in Situationist hands] a guide to action, dwells precisely on this dialectic. Spectacle is commodification perfected: once upon a time [in Polanyi's universe] it was only the ruling realities of land, labor, and money that stood to be de-realized and turned into fully fungible abstractions; now it is body, desire, identity, community, subjectivity, "difference" itself. Maybe the de-realization is irreversible. But perhaps there is a *politique du pire* even in the realm of unreality. Images are not in and of themselves "unreal." What is unreal is their self-sufficiency, their being-together in a circuit in which they appear to be what they show. What is unreal is the one-way street of representation—the fact that images, in so many circumstances, are not open to recall, correction, parody, refutation. Without being in the least starry-eyed about the specific battlecries and combatants at present, we can say that the last few years have seen the one-way street begin to turn into a site of house-to-house warfare. The Left will continue an irrelevance—as it mostly is to master—or if it fails to respond to this struggle for presence over the means of symbolic production. Polanyi may still prove right. He believed, you will recall, that capitalism's progressive dissolution and fragmentation of human sociality was bound to reach an end-point, in which the fictitiousness of the commodity world would prove self-defeating. Human sociality, he thought, simply could not sustain itself without a texture of practices that continually put men and women back in contact with nature, materiality, and each other. Spectacle, Polanyi would have felt, is simply a further stage in the destruction of those practices. And at a certain point the process will implode. For him, the present desperate—and most often frightening—efforts to wrest the image-

2 David Brooks, New York Times, 23 July 2008

machines from their owners' hands, and *turn them against modernity itself*, would be only the first sign, the opening salvo, in a new battle to reconstitute the human. We hope he is right.

SW: In the book *Afflicted Powers*, Islamic fundamentalist terrorism is categorically condemned, but it is credited with being the only "adequate" opposition to modernity. The final chapter of the book asks what such an opposition from the Left might look like. But why must Modernity itself be opposed? Or, to change the emphasis, why is it *modernity* that must be opposed?

The final chapter of *Afflicted Powers* introduces a variation of Nietzsche's question, "What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?" Retort asks "What Does The Vanguard Ideal Mean?" In his own question Nietzsche, you point out, "is very far from dismissing" the ascetic ideal, rather, he is interested in its "purpose," its "historical function." You then advocate for the same approach to a critique of the vanguard ideal. But your own verdict on the phenomenon of the vanguard ideal is that it "was an understandable response to the reality... of history." But does this not imply that such a response was merely mistaken, rendering your critique somewhat dismissive? Do you feel that vanguard revolutionary leadership has had and can have no historical function in the development of revolutionary consciousness, even if ultimately such forms of leadership must be worked through and overcome?

In that same chapter you imagine a militant's pledge to *not* be modern. To what degree is this possible, and how should we interpret such a sentiment today? If one can choose to not be modern, can one, conversely, choose to be modern? Should one? Does one have to?

Retort: Your basic intuition here is right: for us the questions of modernity and vanguardism are intertwined. The vanguard model of revolutionary action—the belief that history has a knowable path into the future, and that the key forces that go to make that future can and must be represented [in the two senses of the word] by a disciplined set of proprietors of historical truth—is one pure form of an historical consciousness that stands at the center of modernity as we understand it. We think this a poisonous heritage. The theory of history is wrong; the stress put on representation is wrong; and both errors lead on to something much worse than error: the theory and practice of the proprietorship of truth, about whose consequences for the Left, and its victims, in the last century the less said the better.

We make a distinction between vanguardism and political leadership. If the latter can be prized apart from the history/representation/proprietorship triad, a whole field of necessary—and difficult—questions opens up. Of course Left politics revolves in part around small groups of intellectuals with (occasionally) bright ideas. Of course

resistance to the present order suffers often from being too local and single-issue, or from still seeing its particular struggle in "broader" terms borrowed from Lenin or Mao or Slavoj Žižek. Small groups with a sense of history—because we deny that history is knowable as a totality and a "direction," does not mean we think it any the less important for particular refutable theses about its past and present shape to be made part of the Left's practical armory—have a job to do. Resistance often needs to be focused. Small groups can sometimes be crucial in providing initiative, or even a "larger framework." The very word "leadership" need not put us in a panic: the task is to align it with craftsmanship or seamanship or musicianship—that is, to tie it to competence in a particular set of tasks and skills. All of which amounts to saying that if "vanguard" or "militant" could be robbed of their metaphors of history as Napoleonic campaign—with always the same-but-different Napoleon moving the masses on his map in the tent—then even these words might be reclaimable. But we doubt it.

It interests us that many of our best readers on the Left balk at our seeming hostility to the modern. [Several of our worst readers conflate our hostility with that of the Islamist vanguard. But such idiocies are par for the course.] Rather than try yet again to state that "modernity" is not a specifiable set of social and technical advances—from which, obviously, there is no turning back—but a specific symbolic economy, a picture of history and subjectivity... Rather than pointing to the fact that the effective present form of resistance to capitalism just is an attack on capitalism as the carrier of that symbolic economy, and that the Left will permanently sideline itself if it leaves the terms of critique in the hands of al-Zawahiri... Rather than asking if a critique of modernity has necessarily to end up as a primitivism... [Obviously we think not. And the fear of a new primitivism is at present mainly an alibi for the Left's not thinking about the crisis of natural resources, and what might be involved in a politics of real deceleration of "development." The deceleration will happen, we think, whether we like it or not. We are living through its beginnings. The problem for the Left, then, is how to prevent the process bringing on an atomism that will make Fascism itself look benign.] Rather than repeating ourselves, let us turn the tables. Why is modernity the sticking point for so much of the Left? Again the question of vanguardism looms. For if our argument has been that modernity is now in crisis, what we mainly mean by this—our critics have sensed as much—is that its very model of temporality is foundering: its assumption that history is future-directed, and therefore open to direction. And could there be a Left without such an assumption? What will the Left be like without futurity—without the notion of the vanguard as true believers of history? Modernity is precious to its handmaidens—a present without modernity is unthinkable—above all because the modern is always about to deliver its "next stage," its *aufhebung*. **IP**

Remember the future!

A rejoinder to Peter Hudis on "Capital in History"

Chris Cutrone

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS articulates the problem of what "ought" to be with what "is." The question is how the necessities of emancipatory struggles in the present relate to those of the past. The tasks revealed by historical Marxism have not been superseded but only obscured and forgotten, at the expense of emancipatory social politics in the present.

Dunayevskaya and post-Trotskyism

The problem with Raya Dunayevskaya lies in the belief that there has been any real theoretical or practical political progress since the failure of the revolutions of 1917-19. This imagined progress is explicitly or implicitly assumed in all "Trotskyism" and post-Trotskyism.

Contrary to the prevailing views of post-Marxism, the high-water mark of progress in the movement for human freedom was in the practical politics and theoretical self-understanding of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks in Russia and Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacists in Germany. We have not progressed beyond the horizon of such political practice and its theory, but only regressed and fallen below this threshold. We urgently need to attain its spirit anew.

For the past half century, revolutionary "Left" politics, Marxist or otherwise, have remained stuck in the antinomies of "spontaneity" and "organization," "participatory democracy" and "vanguardist" politics, etc. Meanwhile, the historical moment of 1917-19 and its protagonists in thought and action remain *enigmas* to us.

A repressed historical fact: neither Lenin nor Luxemburg was a "vanguardist" or a "spontaneist." These and other phantasies—indeed, any apparent resolution to, and progress beyond, the genuine political *problems* of social emancipation beyond capital revealed in 1917-19—are pernicious illusions.

Dunayevskaya never properly registers the problem of *regression*. The most problematic assumption is that coming later means knowing better. But newly emergent forms of "resistance to capital" might be symptomatic of regression, and thereby not point beyond capitalist social relations any more—and perhaps far less—than proletarian socialism did in the early 20th Century. It is not a matter of such new forms of politics expressing advances in social-political consciousness, but rather the effects of the horizon of a Marxian anticapitalist politics slipping away.

Hudis's conception of capital as the domination of living labor by abstract labor leads to his equating all forms of resistance to capital as forms of "living labor's" protest against and purportedly immanent attempt to overcome capital.

Such an analysis finds "new" forms of anticapitalism in the social movements of the 1960s "New Left" (e.g.,

women's and gay liberation, black power, anti-colonialism). The "New Left", however, actually represented a *turning away* from the problem of capital.

Why? Because only through proletarian socialism does the problem of the "contradiction" of capital—the self-contradictory character of proletarian labor in *both* its "abstract" and "concrete" dimensions—come to light. For capital is *not* merely the abstract dimension dominating the concrete, "living" dimension. It is rather the ways the abstract and concrete dimensions are *related* through market or state forms. Capital is the mode of self-relation of the proletariat and its consequences as a social-historical *totality*. All forms of "resistance to capital" constitute its reproduction in an on-going way.

Proletarian socialism, on the other hand, is the movement that reveals the self-contradiction of capital *most explicitly and intensely* in its reproduction. Other symptomatic forms of *coping* with the capital dynamic do so only more *obscurely*. Only proletarian socialism, the most acute manifestation of the self-contradiction of capital, concretely points beyond it.

We need a proletarian socialist politics to *manifest* the problem of capital for us, so that we can begin to formulate a politics for getting beyond it.

The degree to which an approach such as Hudis's attempts to be more open-minded about social struggles and their relation to the problem of capital, it actually conceals more than it reveals. Capital is a *form of life*, however "alienated," and not just a form of domination "over" life. Hence, one cannot take the position of "life" against capital, of "living labor" against "abstract labor," without naturalizing capital at another, deeper level.

Marx's political vision: the "dictatorship of the proletariat"

Recognizing capital as a form of life also means recognizing the truly radical difference between a post-capitalist society and the society of capital. It is, in fact, *too* radical for us to really foresee, despite humanity's struggle to realize it over the course of more than a century. To clarify the relationship between the historical present and a possible future, it is helpful to consider Marx's political thinking on socialism.

Marx's understanding of socialist politics is expressed most clearly in his notion of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." For Marx, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is not merely the overcoming of abstract labor by living labor, but rather the *highest expression* of their contradiction in the subjectivity of the commodity form.

Further, it expresses the contradiction of the democratic will of the producers in both their particular—"concrete" and "abstract"—general social dimensions. For

example, the "participatory"-democratic ordering of the site of production will conflict with the more abstract "representative" democracy of political forms at a more general social level. In fact, the political circumstances of socialism would likely produce social conflicts, and hence politics. In a sense it would be, by comparison with the present, the *first time* in which authentic social-politics can be practiced.

In this sense, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" marks the end of politics as we know it, and the *beginning* of politics in a new and more advanced sense, with the working class and its activity helping to point beyond the social dynamic of capital. I disagree with Hudis that historical revolutionary Marxist protagonists such as Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky adopted a fundamentally different conception of the future of politics than Marx. Each of them, to the contrary, recognized the necessary leading, "vanguard" role of the working class in the attempt to democratize, or bring under conscious human control, the social process set in motion by capital.

The dynamic of capital does not evaporate through the activity of the working class. Quite the contrary, it is through this activity that capital, as Marx understood it, comes into being. Through the "dictatorship of the proletariat," however, the working class plays the necessarily *leading* role globally in addressing the problem of capital and its effects. In other words, it is the *political* means by which the *social* problem of capital is revealed so that it can *begin* to be overcome.

The proletariat then becomes for the first time, in Lukács's Hegelian-Marxist terms, the subject-object of [its own] history. At the same time, the proletariat as a class begins to cease being the self-contradictory "subject-object" it is today under capital. The proletariat, when these conditions are met, becomes itself for the first time while ceasing to be what it has been—constituted by and re-constitutive of capital—and thus begins to *overcome* and *abolish* itself.

The most potentially "participatory" concrete form of democracy, that of "the producers," must be recognized as the highest expression of the subjectivity of the *commodity form*, the subject-object relation of the proletariat with its own social activity of labor—and not as its "negation." Hence, evading or otherwise abandoning Marx's conception of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" means abandoning the struggle to overcome capital. We need to remember what this actually meant by way of studying the most developed expressions to date of such a politics. We must remember the tasks of the past still informing our present by recalling what it was that revolutionary Marxism sought to accomplish, despite its historical failure.



El Lissitzky's Lenin Tribune (1920)

Remember the future!

The political thought and action bound up in the revolutionary moment of 1917-19 comprise a complex, rich heritage we neglect at our peril. This heritage, that of Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky and theorists in their wake, such as Lukács, Korsch, Benjamin and Adorno, is in the form of a set of *problems* to be worked through and not ready-made solutions.

In order to recognize these outstanding problems of capital we must *remember the future* whose horizons of *possibility* informed the politics of the best traditions of revolutionary Marxism. Despite the limitations of Marxism as a historical movement, we nevertheless remain within the horizon of the history of capital and its social effects, whether politics today recognizes it or not. Hence, apparently paradoxically, it is by recognizing the horizons of possibility of capital as revealed in the past that we may recognize the limits humanity needs to overcome to realize its potential, emancipated future.

For example, in the earlier Marxist movement of the 2nd International (1889-1914), the women's liberation movement took place as an integral part of the struggle for socialism, to which it was neither subordinated nor from which it was separated. Such Marxist socialists as August Bebel and Clara Zetkin, among countless other, now-forgotten, participants in this movement, achieved profound insights into the relation of traditional gender roles and sexuality to the radically changed circumstances of modern capitalism. They recognized how capitalism both drew upon and radically reconstituted, on a new and different basis, such "traditional" oppressive aspects of society.

Future, continued from page 3

Furthermore, they recognized the obstacle to women's emancipation capital had become and thus the fundamental connection between women's and sexual oppression and other problems in modern society. It was only because of the subsequent degeneration and conservatism of this movement, due to a series of failures and defeats, that a separate "feminist" movement had to come into being in the course of the regression of the 20th Century. Embracing the history of feminism thus amounts to naturalizing and adapting to such defeat and lowering the horizons of social politics.

Over-attentiveness to newly emergent—though concrete—forms of "resistance" to capitalism amounts to chasing our tails in the present and tailing after the effects of capital. Such over-attentiveness does not broaden but *narrows* our horizons; it does not, as Luxemburg demanded, engage, seize hold of and attempt to guide, in however limited ways, the changes in and of capital, so that we might get beyond them. "Resistance" in the present represents attempts to cope with and thus *catch up* with the social dynamics of capital. And the terms of such resistance have only worsened over time with the waning and disappearance of proletarian socialist politics.

Far from pointing to a post-capitalist society, such forms of social struggle under capital actually represent the limits of the present and its future, but only in obscure form, and thus not the actual breadth of the horizon of a potential future of and beyond capital. They express not the potentially new future beyond capital, but only the trailing edge, the wake of the newly emerging *past in the present*.

The post-'60s "new social movements" such as feminism and other forms of politics of social identity have expressed reconstituted forms of participation in capital. Not "getting beyond" the working class as might have been thought, such movements have opened the way to new and reconstituted forms of proletarianization. Moreover, they have done so in ways that have obscured the problem of the social totality in which they have taken place—the central role of the working class in the reconstitution of capital. The illusion is that such new forms of politics mean getting beyond the necessity of proletarian socialism, when in fact they have meant the avoidance of this task.

Such purportedly post-proletarian forms of politics have represented new forms of *capital* in an already-captured future of the present. They do not help us recognize the actual necessary tasks of a politics in, through and beyond capital, to which it was neither subordinated nor from which it was separated. Such Marxist socialists as August Bebel and Clara Zetkin, among countless other, now-forgotten, participants in this movement, achieved profound insights into the relation of traditional gender roles and sexuality to the radically changed circumstances of modern capitalism. They recognized how capitalism both drew upon and radically reconstituted, on a new and different basis, such "traditional" oppressive aspects of society.

Friedman, continued from page 2

despite his avowed intentions, Friedman chose his battle, against Keynesian economics, and made his devil's bargain compromise, with the power of the Fordist state, and we have paid the price for this politics. This is a real aspect of Friedman's legacy, and deserves critique and opposition, and not least from the perspective of the tradition of classical liberalism from which Friedman drew his thinking but ultimately ended up betraying. As Naomi Klein correctly points out, the irony of Friedman and his legacy is that his anti-Keynesian economic policy advocacy depended upon the very power of the (Fordist, national) state against whose unfreedom he was ostensibly aiming his critique.

But Klein and the "Left" she represents are also not free of such inconsistency from the standpoint of the struggle for greater freedom. They share the inability to regard properly the [post-] Fordist (national) state, for which Klein explicitly apologizes, especially when advocating its developing-world varieties, at least as much as Friedman did by default in his opportunism. But Hayek would have known better.

The second question we in Platypus posed to Klein at her talk was "what is to be done?" Initially, Klein had little to say in this regard. But later in the Q&A, she responded, in an intentionally "provocative" way, that one thing that could be done would be to "nationalize the oil industry." Klein understands such a demand to be part of her greater advocacy of a "new New Deal," an idea gaining traction in light of the present economic crisis and the expectations of change with the coming election.

But we need to be careful not to conflate the different dimensions of the historic Keynesian-Fordist state and its social-politics as well as its economic policies, for in doing so we would lose the distinction between its liberal and illiberal aspects, and thus lose the criterion of *freedom*. Hayek's critique of the problems of the 1930s Left and its ostensibly "socialist" collusion with the emergent national-state form remains valid. For such "socialism" fell below the threshold of the freedom of capitalism as it had developed under preceding, more "liberal" historical conditions, prior to WWII, an important turning-point Hayek recognized. Hayek was harking back to earlier thinkers in the classical liberal tradition such as Benjamin Constant, who in the early 19th Century saw in national-collectivist politics the betrayal of modern forms of both individual and social freedom.

For not only Friedman but his mentor Hayek would have blanched at Klein's thought of universal oil nationalizations—from Hugo Chavez's Venezuela and Ahmedinejad's Iran to Putin's Russia, and an Obama "new New Deal" America—and for good reason. As Friedman's mentor Hayek perceived in the emergence of the Fordist national state after WWII, in both its relatively benign as well as grossly pathological forms, such a wave of nationalizations would lay the ground very well, and very quickly, for future wars and other forms of social destruction, at the expense of the freedom-potential a more liberal and cosmopolitan capitalism makes possible. **IP**

Anti-Gentrification, continued from page 2

like Dessie. Nevertheless, the fundamental question posed by her article—when we fight gentrification, what are we fighting for?—is one that cannot be ignored. I think there are two different ways to answer it. The first is this: the assumption that gentrification is simply an inevitable product of a capitalist society is one that the developers hovering over Grove Parc would like us to make, but it is not warranted. Neighborhoods can be revitalized without being gentrified. The current state of Grove Parc is not a consequence of the natural function of capitalism, but of the dysfunction of under-funded bodies like HUD that have mismanaged the nation's public housing stock whilst pouring taxpayers' money into the hands of badly-vetted proprietors. A reformed and better funded HUD would prevent the crumbling neglect that makes poorer neighbourhoods so vulnerable to gentrification and dislocation. On this view, far from seeking to overcome capitalist society, anti-gentrification activism simply demands that government do the job it is supposed to do.

That is the first answer. I think that it is good as far as it goes, but on the most fundamental level it gets us no further than Schmidt's critique of the politics of gentrification or the developers' mantra of progress through capital. What all three approaches have in common is the understanding of gentrification as a purely abstract phenomenon. There is nothing wrong with this in principle; indeed, for those on the receiving end of social upheaval, understanding one's own struggles as part of a wider context can be illuminating and empowering. What is generally forgotten, however, is that there is no such thing as the view from nowhere. Any account of social phenomena, however abstract, is rooted in a particular situation, and cannot be understood apart from the particular interests and relationships that characterize it. For me to offer an analysis of some problem of yours is not for me to take up a perspective outside of our relationship, but to add a new element to it. With this in mind, let us be clear about the context in which this essay is written. The possible foreclosure of Grove Parc is Dessie's problem, not mine. As Schmidt points out, I may well hear about it in an organic

coffee shop built when the last wave of gentrification rolled through. Dessie would take my comfortable, middle-class existence any day, and I know because she's told me. If my solidarity with her is based on some vaguely-imagined identity politics that serves to preserve the ghetto for the blacks, she'd be better off without me.

The fact is, however, that I have reason to stand alongside Dessie that is entirely self-interested. Gentrification is just one symptom of a sickness that has taken hold of modern urban society: we have become strangers to one another. If we students think that our comparative wealth and mobility leaves us unaffected, we are deluding ourselves. To live in a neighborhood patrolled by one of the world's largest private police forces is not healthy. To move within a culturally homogenous bubble is not healthy. To be afraid of crossing a street only a few blocks from where you live for fear of the people on the other side is not healthy. Like all